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RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 2474
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 5395
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 003120

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS
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PACOM PASS AMB. JOHN, A/S HILL, DAS MARCIEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TH](#) [CB](#)
SUBJECT: SITUATION CALM OCTOBER 16 AROUND DISPUTED PREAH
VIHEAR AREA, THAI SHOW OFF ALLEGED CAMBODIAN LANDMINE

REF: BANGKOK 3094 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. James F. Entwistle, reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

11. (C) The situation in the Preah Vihear temple area appeared calm October 16 as the two sides reportedly agreed to conduct joint patrols in the disputed area. The Thai MFA asserted in a briefing for the diplomatic corps that Cambodia had recently placed mines in the disputed area and presented what it said was one such mine for inspection. The MFA also expressed frustration at what it claimed was a lack of patience on the part of the Cambodian government in trying to resolve the border conflict; a Royal Thai Armed Forces General expressed similar confusion over why Hun Sen would have initiated armed conflict at this time.

12. (C) Comment: We are pleased that the two sides have reportedly been able to agree to joint patrols that could be a useful confidence building measure. However, the buildup of military assets in the vicinity of the temple and continued rhetoric by both sides create an environment that could lead to further conflict. With the Thai Parliament scheduling the mid-August Thai-Cambodian provisional agreement for consideration October 22, we hope that the two sides will refrain in the interim from escalating tensions. We will continue to urge restraint and consultation on the Thai side. End Summary and Comment.

SITUATION ON THE BORDER CALM

13. (C) As of late October 16 the situation at Preah Vihear appeared calm, with no reports of further clashes. DAO observers who traveled October 16 to vicinity near Preah Vihear reported the situation quiet. Thai artillery were seen in the vicinity, as well as heavy transport vehicles that had likely been used to transport tanks to the area. The Royal Thai Army (RTA) had reportedly recently deployed at

least one artillery (likely 155 millimeter guns) and one tank battalion to augment Thai troops in the vicinity of the disputed area.

¶4. (C) Colonel Werachon Sukondhapatipak, Director of the Foreign Liaison Division at the RTA Headquarters, told us early October 16 that the situation on the border was calm. The RTA retained forces in the disputed area and was ready to reinforce those troops. Werachon made a point of reiterating the RTG's intention to defend Thai territorial rights.

¶5. (SBU) Media reports late October 16 said the Thai and Cambodian militaries had agreed to conduct joint military patrols in the disputed territory. The Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters (RTARF) told Defense Attaches during a late October 16 briefing that Thai and Cambodian military representatives would meet October 21 under the auspices of the Regional Border Committee. The RTARF confirmed that local commanders from the two sides had met earlier October 16 but did not have details on the results of the meeting. The RTARF also reiterated Thai Army Commander General Anupong's public statements that Thailand would not initiate hostilities in the disputed area and would only respond with force commensurate to that displayed by Cambodia. The RTARF said approximately 600 Thai troops were located approximately 10 kilometers from the temple and stood ready to support paramilitary troops located in the disputed zone. The RTARF claimed that 1,600 Cambodian troops were located in Cambodian territory below the temple.

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THAILAND CLAIMS STRONG EVIDENCE OF RECENTLY-PLACED MINES

¶6. (SBU) During a October 16 briefing for the diplomatic corps led by MFA Director-General Virachai Plasai, the MFA claimed that "it was a fact" that Cambodia had recently placed mines in the disputed territory near the Preah Vihear temple. Evidence to this effect included a mine that appeared to be new, fresh soil found over the mines, the strength of the October 6 explosions that injured Thai troops, and the tightness of the detonator found in the mine that had been removed from the disputed area.

¶7. (SBU) The MFA presented for inspection by the diplomatic corps a mine that it claimed had been removed from the disputed area October 12 after two previously marked mines had disappeared from the area. The MFA said the mine was a Russian-made PMN 2 landmine. The mine appeared (by the inspection of Embassy representatives who attended the briefing) to be a new mine, not one that had been weathered by being located in the ground for 20 to 30 years since the Khmer Rouge era. The MFA also claimed that the mines found in recent days were placed on well-worn pathways used by Thai troops to patrol the disputed area and which had been used regularly by local villagers prior to the outbreak of tensions over the Preah Vihear temple.

CONFLICTING REPORTS ON THAI CAPTIVES

¶8. (U) Local newspapers October 16 featured the October 15 border clash incident and reported that 7 Thai soldiers had been wounded. Media reports said the RTA claimed that 2 Cambodian soldiers were killed and 2 were injured during the fighting. The media also reported that Cambodia claimed to have taken 10 Thai paramilitary rangers captive. Despite official Thai denials to the contrary, photos in the local media and in the IHT appeared to confirm Cambodian claims that had they taken Thai troops captive. One photo showed a Cambodian soldier talking on a radio while 4 Thai paramilitary rangers sat unarmed nearby in the traditional Ranger uniform of black pants and shirt. A caption for another photo claimed to show an armed Cambodian soldier standing watch over several Thai paramilitary soldiers. MFA

Director-General Virachai stressed during the October 16 briefing to the diplomatic corps that the pictures that the media had published earlier in the day had been taken some time earlier when the two sides were mingling amicably.

¶9. (C) RTA Colonel Werachon disputed the reports of Thai captives and said that the RTA had accounted for all military and paramilitary troops in the area. The Cambodian claim of Thai captives was "propaganda." Werachon confirmed the reports of Thai injuries but said none was life threatening. Most of the wounds were from small arms fire and from explosions of rocket-propelled grenades. Werachon said the RTA had evidence that 3 Cambodian soldiers had been wounded.

RTG ASKS "WHY ESCALATE TENSIONS NOW?"

¶10. (U) During the October 16 briefing, MFA Director-General Virachai repeatedly expressed RTG frustration that the Cambodian government had not been patient in trying to resolve the dispute. Virachai said that the Thai constitution required Parliamentary approval of the provisional agreement that had been agreed to by then-Thai Foreign Minister Tej Bunnag and Cambodian Foreign Minister Hor Namhong in mid-August. The Thai Parliament would consider the agreement October 22, Virachai said. Thailand was committed to addressing the issue bilaterally and peacefully and would display the patience necessary to come

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to resolve the issue.

¶11. (C) In a late October 15 conversation with a DAO representative, Lieutenant General Surapong Suwana-adth, Director of Joint Intelligence at the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters, expressed surprise at the pace of the conflict.

Surapong asked rhetorically: "why do you think that the Cambodians have pushed the issue so quickly?" Surapong said many factors could be involved, one of which could be "influence" on Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. DAO will separately report more from this conversation.
ENTWISTLE